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ABSTRACT

A commission of business leaders appointed by the governor of Colorado studied adult basic education (ABE) in the state in order to determine its value to the citizens of the state and to the state's future. Throughout a 6-month period, the commission discussed issues pertaining to the field with private providers, adult learners, and government agency representatives from many fields and areas of the state. Commission members asked questions about the following: coordination of services, funding, educational system attainment of students and parents, economic ramifications, adult undereducation and prison, and education and welfare reform. From this research they arrived at a definition of ABE, outlined four methods of instruction in ABE (ABE, family literacy, work force education, and workplace education), identified 10 values that constitute the system on which the commission built recommendations, and created a vision for adult education ("a demand-side strategy"). The commission made eight recommendations for improving the ABE system and issued a call for action. (Contains 14 references.) (KC)

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# LEARNING LASTS A LIFETIME.

## Colorado's Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning

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# REPORT OF THE COLORADO BUSINESS COMMISSION ON ADULT BASIC LEARNING

APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR ROY ROMER
STATE OF COLORADO
SEPTEMBER, 1991

MASTERCRAFT

AN ELKAY COMPANY

August 1997

Dear Governor Romer:

In his free time, my teenage son competes in white water slalom races. His team's chosen motto is, "You've gotta be tough if you're gonna be stupid!" When I asked him why the team chose that phrase as theirs, his response was, "It seems harsh, but it's both advice and a warning. When you go out on big water, you'd better have done your homework. There can be bad consequences if you're not prepared." Fortunately, he's had some excellent coaching and that lessens some of the anxiety when he heads to the mountains.

Our business commission has spent months, at times in anxious deliberation, examining tne preparedness of our state's citizenry. I am proud that we are able to present in this document the findings of our study. Recognizing that the consequences of ignoring the issues connected to adult literacy can be harsh, our commission looked to tap the tradition of preparedness that has been our state's legacy. As a community of business, government, and education leaders, it is possible to prepare our "statewide community," not for a tough and hazardous future, but one of fulfillment and competitive excellence.

It was clearly evident in our first gathering that our business commission is one of passionate individuals of diverse experience, dedicated to pursuing insight and actions capable of positive impact. Many of us draw from very personal experience and deep conviction, the desire to affect substantive opportunity in the lives of our fellow Coloradans. Manifest to all who have explored the subject of adult basic learning and to the commission members who spent many hours studying and learning with the help of our Advisory Group, the issues are broad, the causes elusive, the solutions often complex. A review of the recommendations in this report, we hope, will provide a forum for leadership and participation driving strong action.

In a time when expediency can swallow experience, where convenience displaces community, it is refreshing to partake of the enthusiasm of this group of business men and women; a group equally willing to work on the details of policy, as to paint with the broad brush of community builders.

May this work serve our state well.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Domlesky
Commission Chairman



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**Governor Romer's Office**
**Mountain Plains Adult Education Association**
**Workforce Coordinating Council**

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**The Report of the Colorado Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning***

# FRAMING THE ISSUE

***"I am pleased with the work of the Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning. Its recommendations are sound and will enable business and government to work together on this important issue."***
*~ Governor Roy Romer*

## Background

On March 6, 1997, Governor Romer appointed a 23 member Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning. The Commission was charged with making a significant contribution to the development of a better prepared future and incumbent workforce, as well as healthier families and communities, through a long-term plan to finance and promote adult basic education.

The Commission included representatives from the banking industry, the communication field, small business, large corporations, the service industry, union labor, economic development organizations, financial consultants and the human resource training field. The Commission was chaired by Bob Domlesky, Vice President in Charge of Operations at MasterCraft Cabinets, Inc., staffed by Michelle Berry, Director of the Governor's Adult Education Initiative, informed by a statewide interagency advisory board and facilitated by David Kolb, from the Institute for Organizational Learning based in Durango, Colorado.

## The Deliberations

***"As wages are increasingly driven by market forces, educational opportunities are becoming an attractive benefit. The revolving door of entry-level workers can be slowed by employers who recognize that adult basic education is an investment just like any other."***
*~ Virginia Rich Memorial Hospital*

Throughout a six-month period, the Commission learned about adult basic education. They discussed the issues pertaining to the field with private providers, adult learners and government agency representatives from the departments of Education, Human Services, Corrections and Labor and Employment, as well as the Community College and Occupational Education System (CCCOES), the Office of Business Development, , the School-to-Career Initiative and the Workforce Coordinating Council. Sharon Darling, president and founder of the National Center for Family Literacy,

* - Adult Basic Education and Adult Basic Learning are used interchangeably throughout the report.



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provided an important national perspective for the Commission.

The members asked difficult questions about the fragmented coordination of services and the unpredictable nature of funding. They looked at the links between the success and failure of the K-12 education system and the educational attainment of parents. They examined the economic ramifications of an undereducated citizenry to the global competitiveness of Colorado. They weighed the direct connection between adult undereducation and the alarming increase in prison populations. They also determined that for welfare reform to be successful, adult basic education options must be available and required aspects of benefit reform. Most importantly, what emerged from these deliberations was the obvious relevance that adult basic education has for every aspect of life in Colorado.

***"I am confident that the diverse residents of Colorado in both urban and rural areas will provide the necessary resources to combat the statewide concern of illiteracy."***
*~Judy Hassell*
*Buena Vista Chamber of Commerce*

Whereas all of the members came to the table with some understanding of workforce training issues, few had a concrete concept of what basic skills education for adults really means. Through the education process, the members acquired an impressive grasp of what adult basic education means for economic development, the development of young children and the overall quality of life in all Colorado communities.

As the Commission entered its deliberation phase, it became apparent that their mission was challenging. The members' perspectives are diverse and the issue is complex. The formation of the following recommendations and action steps represents the membership's willingness to speak with one voice.

***"The levels of prosperity and overall quality of life for many Coloradans can be dramatically raised through adult basic education."***
*~Joni Baird*
*Johns Manville Corp.*

***"We must create a sense of urgency that literacy goals are as important as highways and prisons. Just think of the payoff if the recommendations by this Commission are successful."***
*~Barrie Hartman*
*Boulder Daily Camera*

# WHAT IS ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

*"The work of this Commission has made me realize the relevancy of adult education for every business in every Colorado community."*
*~ Dean Quamme MACTEC Inc.*

## Some Definition

The Commission realized immediately that the adult basic education system is complex and demands explanation. This section seeks to define adult basic education in simple terms so that the most immediate issues are brought to light.

Adult basic education in Colorado relies on a diverse provider system. Initially, the Commission thought that this diversity brought only fragmentation to what should be a smooth continuum. However, after listening to providers, learners and agency representatives, the Commission realized that, while improved coordination of services is imperative, the diverse provider system is essential to the effectiveness of adult basic education because the adults who access services come with a wide range of issues and needs. Many are homeless, some are employed, many are unemployed and most have children. Many adult learners have reservations about learning in traditional classroom settings and some speak native languages other than English. All adult basic education clients are in need of the most basic skills in reading, writing, communicating, problem solving and mathematics.

*"Education and self-esteem go hand-in-hand. In order to impart knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm to our children, we must first possess those qualities ourselves as adults."*
*~ Tim Connors Pinyon Mortgage*

Adult basic education classes are taught in a myriad of locations and settings. Businesses, libraries, schools, and churches are just some of the sites that provide classrooms. Some programs offer one-on-one tutoring, others have traditional classroom settings and many offer both.

There are four methods of instruction in adult basic education.

**adult basic education:** is the acquisition of knowledge and communication and computational competencies which enable adults to solve problems and function effectively in the workplace, family and community. Adult basic education develops such skills as reading, listening, speaking, writing, critical thinking and problem solving. Many adults enrolled in strictly adult basic education programs are working to obtain their general education development diploma (GED).

*"Adult education gives people the foundation of skills they need to have good jobs."*
*~ Vickie Mullinax All-American Personnel*

**family literacy:** is an approach to intergenerational learning centered on

the family. It acknowledges family and culture as the foundations of learning for the child. Family literacy recognizes the parent as the child's first teacher; therefore, the literacy of the parent is crucial to the development of the literacy of the child. Family literacy models integrate early childhood and/or school-age educational assistance, adult basic skills training, parent and children learning together time, and parent support and education.

***"It is time for business and government to cooperate in sharing the responsibility for the training and education of our current workforce."***
*~Mary Ann Looby*
*First Data Corp.*

**workforce education:** refers to instruction and preparation of people who will be engaged in a place of business. Common curricula include: work ethics, job readiness, job retention, and communication skills.

**workplace education:** is the contractual agreement to provide customized curricula and on-site instruction to employees in the workplace and supports the development of essential skills that increases long term employment of workers and productivity in the workplace. Workplace education includes industry-related basic skills which enable workers to adapt to new work environments.

***"As a former adult education student and teacher and as a current business owner, I cannot emphasize enough the impact of adult basic education for the success of the students."***
*~ Dee Melgosa*
*Bison Title*

Adult basic education does not serve a clientele that can afford high tuition rates. As a result, adult education has learned to operate on lean budgets. Seventy-two percent of all adult education programs are taught by volunteers. The average money spent per student per grade level completed is approximately $229. In comparison, the per pupil operating revenue of the K-12 system is currently $4,000 per student per grade level, and the full-time equivalent rate in the community college system is $1500. The Commission also learned that 95 percent of all federal Adult Education Act funds (the only specified funding for adult basic education in Colorado) must go toward instructional activities. This means that programs have little money for outreach or marketing activities.

Adult education programs obtain important returns on investment with minimal expenditure. All learners gain vital skills and knowledge. Many obtain GED diplomas and United States' citizenship. Many secure gainful employment and subsequently begin to make individual monetary investments in the economy. Many vote for the first time, others learn important parenting skills as well as the knowledge necessary to further their children's education. Most importantly, all learners experience a significant increase in their self-esteem and gain the confidence and knowledge necessary to seek employment and become active, engaged citizens in their communities.

***"I believe our effort to educate everyone is never futile. If we help even one person, it is not in vain."***
*~ James D'Agostino*
*Mt. San Rafael Hospital*

## A FOUNDATION OF VALUES

***"Reading opens the door to imagination and dreams which are the keys to success and fulfillment. We must give every Coloradan the ability to open the door."***
*~ Ron Scott*
*Pueblo Electricians' Union*

The Commission based much of its deliberation on an assumption of values. The following set of values constitutes the foundation on which the Commission built its recommendations.

- Education and the learning process must be valued and encouraged at all stages of an individual's life. Both the public and the private sectors must play active roles in making lifelong learning more than a theoretical concept.
- Responsibility for the educational levels of all Coloradans must be shared by every stakeholder. Stakeholders include individuals, businesses, policy-makers, and local and state government agencies.
- Children deserve qualified parents. Those qualifications include the ability and skill to provide educational, emotional and economic nurturing.
- Parents are children's first, most impressive role models. Families are indispensable foundations of community life that must be valued. Family literacy must be utilized as a tool to empower parents to understand and engage in their children's early education.

***"Adult basic education is a significant element in quality growth and economic development. It empowers people to live better lives."***
*~ Mel Otero*
*Pueblo Latino Chamber of Commerce*

- K-12 education reform and renewal efforts, such as the School-to-Career initiative, are essential to the future health of our state and nation. The K-12 system must do its part to stem illiteracy in future generations by producing literate, able, and skilled graduates. However, K-12 reform is a long-term solution -- employers have an urgent need for qualified workers today.
- Colorado's current reluctance to provide the adult population with basic education will be, if it is not already, a severe hindrance to its ability to compete in the increasingly global marketplace.
- As we enter the 21st century, Colorado's continued economic vitality will increasingly rely on human capital for innovations in productivity. Therefore, it is vital that we invest in programs that will increase the skills of our workforce.

***"We must make every effort to prevent the increasing need for adult basic education. Prevention starts with families and includes schools and community involvement."***
*~ Enid Brodsky*
*E&H Consultants*

- Colorado policy-makers must move away from the dichotomous thinking of adult basic education as an either/or priority. Adult basic education does not have to be in place of something else: it is a piece of K-12 education, welfare reform, economic development and crime prevention.

- Initiatives in the areas of adult basic education, K-12 education, higher education, vocational education, early childhood education, welfare reform and workforce training are related and complimentary. Policy-makers, individuals and business leaders must be willing to "think outside the box" and acknowledge the reciprocity between these initiatives. Policies must then reflect that interdependence and promote cooperation.

- Welfare reform must succeed. Entire communities are negatively affected when neighbors are impoverished and dependent on public assistance. To ensure the success of welfare reform, however, people must be given the opportunity to empower themselves.

***"Our company has invested in adult basic education training and our employees are now genuinely committed to lifelong learning. Because of that, we will continue our investment."***
*~ Mike Murphy*
*Anheuser-Busch*

## THE VISION: A DEMAND-SIDE STRATEGY

The demand for adult basic education far exceeds the supply. According to census data from 1990, almost half a million Colorado adults over the age of 19 do not have a high school diploma. Eighteen percent of our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends are functionally undereducated. Currently, only 45,000 adults receive adult basic education services in Colorado annually. Yet, Colorado continues to be only one of a handful of states that does not invest state funds in adult basic education.

Colorado's business community demands adult basic education services. In a *Jobs for Colorado's Future* study, 35 percent of employers rated their semi-skilled employees as poor or fair in reading skills and 40 percent rated the same employees as poor or fair in mathematics skills. Eighty percent of the workforce of 2005 is working today and while K-16 education reform and renewal is vital to our health as a nation, it is not enough to meet employers' needs for adequate workers today. The demand for qualified workers must be met to ensure Colorado's continued economic vitality.

***"The true meaning o success is using your life to make a positiv difference in another life. Volunteering in an adult education program is one way t make that difference."***
*~ Willie Tyler*
*Colorado National Bank*

***"Our state's greatest natural resource is it people. We must commit to developin each person's potential by providin the learning tools, funding and awareness needed to ensure all Coloradan have basic literacy."***
*~ Sue Ferguson*
*US WEST*

*"Adult basic education positively affects both large corporations and small businesses. Because of its individualized structure, it fits perfectly with Colorado's economic diversity."*
*~ Jack Doak*
*JAMS Consulting*

Colorado's communities are also demanding adult basic education. There is increasing insistence on reductions in public spending for interventionist strategies against social ills (such as prisons and welfare). In Fiscal Year 1996, Colorado spent $50.6 million on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) recipients. National estimates show that society will pay between $291,000 and $466,000 in lost productivity and tax revenue for every high school drop-out. Furthermore, it costs approximately $23,000 to house an inmate for one year in a Colorado prison. Coloradans are beginning to understand the benefits of prevention versus intervention. Thus, social realities are increasingly dictating that intervention strategies be shifted to favor prevention measures - one of which should be adult basic education.

*"As the industry has changed, it has forced us to re-examine our commitment to basic education and training. We are more determined than ever to give our employees the opportunity to learn on the job."*
*~ Russ Weimer*
*EXCEL Beef*

The Commission members agree that in healthy market economies, supply is created to meet demand. That has not happened with adult basic education. The resources available for programs are so minimal that expansion is often not an option. In light of welfare reform and workforce development realities, this must change. The Commission recognizes that money alone will not solve the entire dilemma. However, there must be adequate resources to supply the demand.

The Commission concluded that a demand-side strategy must be constructed for adult basic education. That strategy should include simultaneous investment in economic development and adult basic education. The demand is obvious and Colorado has adequate resources to make the investment.

*"Adult basic education is an essential tool in nipping the intergenerational cycles of poverty and violence in the bud."*
*~ Dianna Berry*
*Wal-Mart, Corp*

*"All people should know they have unlimited opportunities. Adult education helps make dreams come true."*
*~ Don Kelin*
*CADDO Office Products*

# RECOMMENDATION 1

THE STATE OF COLORADO SHOULD MAKE A COMMITMENT TO LITERACY FOR ALL COLORADANS BY AMENDING STATE LAW TO GRANT EVERY INDIVIDUAL, REGARDLESS OF AGE, THE RIGHT TO A FREE, BASIC EDUCATION AS LONG AS THE INDIVIDUAL IS WORKING TO ACHIEVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR ITS EQUIVALENT.

**GOAL: To increase Colorado's rate of diploma achievement from 78 percent to 94 percent by 2002.**

Under Colorado law, the age cap for a person to receive a free basic education (high school diploma or GED) is 20 years and 11 months. There are many barriers that can hinder an individual's ability to stay in school and graduate within the first 20 years of life. This is evidenced by the 22% Colorado drop-out rate for 1996. It is a statement of faith and support to allow individuals, at any time in their lives, to undertake the process of empowerment that attaining a basic education initiates. Preserving and enhancing the quality of life within the state, means making an ongoing commitment to improving the abilities and potential of one of our greatest resources, our people.

To make the above recommendation feasible, the Commission believes that there must be funding and other services allocated within the K-12 system to support the adult basic education system. Therefore, it offers the following action ideas that would reallocate some funds and create resource-sharing among programs and school districts to help support adult education programs.

- Allow funds from the per pupil operating revenue, within the K-12 system, to increase the funding and support of adult basic education and GED programs. The formula should be based on the number of students, aged 16 and over, who opt for alternative education or who drop out of the K-12 system altogether. Legislation would simply broaden the scope of the section in the 1997 School Finance Act regarding district compensation for expelled students to include students who drop-out and/or opt for alternative education. In theory, this fund would be temporary, if reduced drop-out goals are achieved statewide.

- Use existing resources and delivery methods to create an outreach and referral system that connects the K-12 education, welfare, and workforce development systems with the adult basic education system.

- Use existing K-16 buildings and business offices to hold classes for adult basic education students. This neither entails placing adults in traditional K-12 classrooms, nor placing additional teaching responsibilities on K-12 educators. Space and materials are an enormous expense for adult basic education programs. A sharing of resources by the K-12 and adult basic education systems would substantially contribute to making education free for those out-of-school Coloradans attempting to graduate from the 12th grade.

- Require appropriate local agencies to allocate a certain percentage of all Job Training Partnership Act and Carl Perkins funding towards adult basic education programs to help support those out-of-school citizens who are working to achieve a high school diploma or its equivalent. Currently, these programs do not allocate any money specifically for basic education, but the operating statutes of both programs do not disallow that activity. Making this action step a reality requires an alteration of local decision-making priorities.

# RECOMMENDATION 2

ESTABLISH A PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY TARGETED AT THOSE PEOPLE WHOSE LOW LITERACY SKILLS HINDER THEIR ABILITY TO GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT BASIC EDUCATION SERVICES.

**GOAL: To increase the number of adults receiving basic education services from 10 percent to 50 percent of the population in need by 2002.**

The tremendous gap between under-educated Coloradans and those who receive adult basic education services argues strongly for a marketing process that effectively connects people and programs. Coloradans who are unable to fully function in and contribute to our communities due to their lack of basic skills are often powerless to access the services they need. Advertising and marketing efforts for adult basic education programs are either minimal or non-existent. Programs operating on meager budgets cannot afford to put significant funds into marketing campaigns. Therefore, programs and learners often rely on word-of-mouth networks between family and friends. A targeted and appropriate marketing strategy is vital to reach the adult basic education market and will bring much needed visibility for programs.

The Commission offers the following action ideas.

- Create, in coordination with the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado Community College system, the permanent Commission on Adult Basic Learning (see Recommendation 7) and corporate sponsors, a statewide public relations campaign to reach persons who need basic education. Such a campaign should be targeted not only at those citizens needing the services, but also at service organizations, such as libraries, schools, churches, hospitals, stores and the local agencies of Human Services, Labor and Employment and Education. Such a campaign could be financed through public and private contributions.

- Since most of the target population cannot adequately read printed information, television and radio campaigns must be emphasized. Therefore, local television and radio stations should offer prime air time for the airing of public service announcements and other programming to promote the availability of adult basic education services.

# RECOMMENDATION 3

BUILD INTO ALL ONE-STOP CAREER CENTERS ACTIVE AND INCLUSIVE COOPERATION WITH ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROVIDERS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

**GOAL: To initially facilitate the development and, ultimately, the placement of current and potential workers in Colorado.**

Linkages and collaboration are needed across the myriad of workforce and education initiatives in the state. One of Colorado's most innovative collaborative efforts is the One-Stop Career Center Initiative led by the Colorado Workforce Coordinating Council and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. These Centers should serve as hubs for adult basic education services.

The Commission offers the following action ideas for consideration by the Workforce Coordinating Council.

- The One-Stop Career Centers should include information about all adult basic education services in the statewide automated system.
- The Workforce Coordinating Council should make basic education a specific priority of their mission.
- Local adult basic education service providers should actively participate on the regional workforce boards to ensure cooperative relationships with the regional One-Stop Career Centers.
- A regional resource partner should be attached to each local workforce board. The resource partner would be responsible for coordinating local and regional adult basic education programs with One-Stop Career Centers. The partners would also facilitate the marketing of One-Stop Career Centers to local businesses. These 18 positions (one per region) should be financed through the legislative appropriation in Recommendation 4. The resource partner should answer directly to the Commission on Adult Basic Learning (see Recommendation 7) and should be responsible for measurable goals and expected outcomes.
- The Colorado Department of Education should continue to coordinate adult basic education providers with one another through its regionalization process. These regions should continue to parallel the One-Stop Career Center regions and should utilize regional resource partners.

# RECOMMENDATION 4

## ESTABLISH, THROUGH THE COLORADO LEGISLATURE, FUNDS SPECIFICALLY INVESTED IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

**GOAL: To create state investment in family and workplace literacy programs in Colorado.**

Resources for adult basic education in Colorado are both scarce and unpredictable. Currently, only two million dollars (all from the unstable, federal Adult Education Act) are specifically allocated to Colorado's adult basic education programs. As the state continues to strive for healthy economic development, it must bolster its commitment to the development of its incumbent and potential workforce and the support of its families. Meeting the training and education needs of our adult citizens is the keystone for ensuring the economic viability of our state. This issue must attain similar prioritization as transportation, taxation and crime among Colorado's legislative policy makers.

The Commission believes this recommendation is critical to achieving the other goals contained in the report and offers the following two action ideas to implement legislation.

Create a new pool of state funds to invest in a four-year program for family literacy.

The program does not need to re-create the wheel, rather it should be:

- distributed to local providers in community-based programs;
- built on quality family literacy programs and models that already exist throughout the state;
- measured and evaluated based on the quantitative improvements of the parents' level of education as well as that of their children. Use of early childhood education, Colorado Department of Education and National Center for Family Literacy evaluative tools is recommended;

- supported solely by the state initially, only to be increased through a formula based on the amount of in-kind contributions given by businesses in the future. If businesses and local organizations do not invest, the state investment would not increase;
- used to partially fund one paid staff person, and;
- monitored by and partially fund the permanent Commission on Adult Basic Learning (and its one paid staff person), as discussed in Recommendation 7.

Appropriate additional funds for a four-year Workplace Learning program.

The dollars should:

- build and support contextual learning programs within businesses to teach basic skills to those employees who are most in need;
- be distributed as mini-grants to businesses and require in-kind matches from participating businesses and foundations;
- support one paid staff person who would coordinate the Commission on Adult Basic Learning, supervise the 18 resource partners and coordinate the Consortia of Learning Organizations (see Recommendations 5 and 7);
- fund the 18 resource partners in each One-Stop Career Center region (see Recommendation 3) and;
- help fund and be monitored by the permanent Commission on Adult Basic Learning, as discussed in Recommendation 7.

# RECOMMENDATION 5

## ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT EMPLOYERS AND UNIONS TO FOSTER LEARNING CULTURES THROUGHOUT THEIR BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES.

**GOAL: To significantly increase the number of businesses who provide basic education services.**

It is vital that businesses support the basic education of their incumbent and potential employees. Increased efficiency, increased profits, improved bottom-lines and a greater tax base are a few of the outcomes that make basic education training a vital and worthwhile investment. However, many businesses of all sizes will only invest in training specific to their business demands and as their resource capacity allows. Clearly, incumbent employees without basic skills are stymied from reaching their full potential while potential employees without basic skills are unattractive to most businesses. Therefore, the Commission recommends that business capacity to include basic education and training in their workforce development efforts be increased. The following action ideas should be initiated by local communities, including local businesses, economic development councils, mayors, city councils, county commissioners, chambers of commerce, and school boards, in coordination with the regional resource partners.

Many business leaders report they are unaware of the available adult basic education services in their communities. It is essential to develop and distribute a business-oriented resource guide describing regional adult basic education options. This guide should:

- explain how businesses can assess the basic education and training needs of their employees;
- explain, through case studies, the value of the return on investment that adult basic education creates through increased worker efficiency and ability;
- include lists of educators, providers, types and sizes of businesses in the region, and other relevant business statistics;
- be created and printed utilizing business donations and public sector partnerships, and;
- be disseminated to every Colorado business through a wide range of distribution centers including the One-Stop Career Centers, the School-to-Career partnerships, chambers of commerce and economic development councils.

The Governor should create the Consortia of Learning Organizations (COLO). The Consortia should be composed of businesses that have invested in training and would facilitate their involvement in adult basic education and help them to leverage resources in support of education and training initiatives. The Consortia would:

- be coordinated by the permanent Commission on Adult Basic Learning with the assistance of one-paid staff person;
- consist of businesses of all sizes who have implemented model basic education training. This core of business leaders would then take an ambassadorial role and encourage other businesses to implement workplace and family literacy training for their employees;
- solicit members' dues, as seed money to create a "Best Practices Training Foundation." Grants would be given to small and mid-sized businesses to assist in creating training appropriate for their employees needing basic education. Technical assistance to grantee businesses should be provided by mentor businesses in the Consortia, the Community College system and the Department of Education;
- publicly recognize individual member businesses for their excellence in basic skills training as measured through a set of human development standards that would include pre-training assessments, partnerships with established adult basic education providers, focus on *all* employees, and post-training evaluation and measurement; and
- govern the distribution of grants through the Best Practices Training Foundation via a volunteer member governing board.

The Colorado General Assembly should broaden the enterprise zone principle to include businesses that implement extensive adult basic education training programs. This should model the School-to-Career tax credits passed in recent years.

Colorado should convene a statewide conference on adult basic education, and other workforce training initiatives, modeled after the School-to-Career Initiative's Employer's Convocation. The conference should target businesses, local and state government agencies, universities, community colleges, school districts and adult basic education programs. The focus should include the need for adult basic education programs within businesses, program choices, best practices models and resource development/partnership possibilities.

# RECOMMENDATION 6

## ESTABLISH A STRATEGY TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS.

**GOAL: To increase the amount of professionals teaching adult basic education classes from 28 percent to 75 percent and secure ongoing professional development for 100 percent of all adult educators.**

Seventy-two percent of all adult basic education programs in Colorado are taught by volunteers and there is a 60 percent turn over rate of both paid staff teachers and volunteer tutors. This is unacceptable. Whereas the Commission recognizes that volunteers are essential to every adult basic education program, it is difficult to build a reliable, quality educational system on a largely untrained volunteer foundation. The adult basic education field has difficulty attracting long-term, career-oriented teachers because of a lack of appropriate, adequate wages and quality teaching environments.

The Commission recommends the following action ideas to businesses and to the State Board of Education.

- Require education administrators (e.g. principals and superintendents) to devote time to adult basic education - both through instruction and professional development.

- Require aspiring and incumbent K-12 teachers to devote a certain number of hours to adult basic education instruction as a licensing requirement.

- Coordinate with universities and other institutions of higher learning to provide classroom space and other resources for adult basic education professional development courses.

- Add adult basic education volunteerism as an avenue for teachers to earn continuing education units.

- Create a best practices "bank" - similar to the Technical Assistance Bank of the Goals 2000 state K-12 standards initiative - for adult basic education practices. Make the bank available to providers statewide through the Internet, Access Colorado Library Information Network (ACLIN), professional conferences, etc.

- Businesses should support recognize the mastery achieved by practitioners in the adult basic education by providing opportunities for master teachers to share their expertise with aspiring professionals and volunteers. This can be achieved by creating "train the trainer" opportunities within individual businesses.

- Businesses should consider approving leave with pay whenever possible for employees wishing to serve as volunteers in adult basic education programs or who wish to become mentors to fellow employees who are adult basic education students. Businesses should also provide employees with information regarding opportunities for matching volunteer time with monetary reimbursement.

- Include adult basic education opportunities, within the context of business, as teaching experiences for licensing (i.e. student teaching). This would serve three purposes. One, the businesses would have a cost-free opportunity to give their employees basic education experiences. Two, student teachers would be exposed to a growing, cutting-edge approach to adult education. Three, the relevancy of education to careers would be made clear for both teacher and student.

# RECOMMENDATION 7

## CREATE A PERMANENT COMMISSION ON ADULT BASIC LEARNING WHICH WILL MAKE DECISIONS REGARDING THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF PROGRAMS WHICH RECEIVE NEW LEGISLATIVE FUNDING.

**GOAL: To ensure business participation in the public sector decision-making in Colorado's workforce training and basic skills investment plan.**

Accountability is required in any business endeavor. One must know where the resources go and what outcomes occur as a result of their use. As Colorado begins to invest in adult basic education, there must be meaningful, measurable outcomes and an entity to account for them. Furthermore, the adult basic education community in Colorado deserves a committed body dedicated to the promotion, study and support of the issues confronting the field. Currently, an Adult Literacy Commission (ALC) exists under the State Board of Education. The Commission believes that the ALC has little decision-making ability due to its submerged position within state government. Therefore, the Commission believes that the ALC would be better situated with the Workforce Coordinating Council so that a true workforce development system can be created in Colorado.

For these reasons, the Commission recommends the following action step.

The Governor and the General Assembly should appoint a permanent Commission on Adult Basic Learning.

This Commission would:

- be appointed by the Governor, approved by the Legislature and coordinated by one paid staff person;
- merge the Governor's Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning and the Adult Literacy Commission, and;
- work as an arm of, and in concert with, the Colorado Workforce Coordinating Council for the purposes of supporting the vision of a coordinated workforce development system in Colorado.

The duties of the Commission should include:

- creating a set of core workplace skills around which the adult basic education field could structure their curriculum and base their evaluation;
- ensuring that the needs of families and all adult learners are met through a cohesive and comprehensive array of services;
- aligning current accountability measurements with business needs - similar to the School-to-Career initiative in Colorado;
- working with the Workforce Coordinating Council (as the fiscal agent) to oversee the distribution and evaluation of new legislative funding sources, utilizing current Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Community College system standards and expertise;
- monitoring and evaluating regional resource partners;
- overseeing a statewide "best practices" bank that adult basic education programs could tap to improve their services, and;
- coordinating the Consortia of Learning Organizations.

# RECOMMENDATION 8

INTEGRATE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN EACH COUNTY'S WELFARE REFORM PLAN.

**GOAL: To increase the potential for self-sufficiency of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients.**

Federal welfare reform legislation requires that approximately 16,000 Colorado welfare recipients become employed and move off welfare by 2002. In order for this to happen, these people must be empowered to become self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency does not mean maintaining several part-time minimum wage jobs; rather, it means having the skills to secure high-wage, high-quality employment. Current federal and state legislation makes it difficult for welfare recipients to dedicate a sufficient amount of time to education-related activities. However, one of the primary barriers to employment is lack of basic skills. Therefore, Colorado must strike a balance between work and training. Transportation to classes and child care options must be stressed at the local levels and family literacy programs should be given special consideration as vital to successful welfare reform.

The Commission recommends the following action steps to ensure that welfare-to-work becomes a successful reality.

- Create state legislation that requires counties to enroll TANF recipients in 5 hours per week of basic education classes. This should be in addition to the 20 hour per week work requirement and should be based on a rigorous, initial educational attainment assessment.

- County commissioners should allocate a sufficient amount of TANF funds to coordinate and facilitate the enrollment of TANF recipients in basic skills education programs.

- The Colorado General Assembly should continue and extend the tax credit for businesses who employ welfare recipients and support basic education needs.

- Create a state funding source for family literacy. Family literacy is welfare reform and the legislation mentioned in Recommendation 4 should serve welfare recipients as well as all other Colorado families needing basic education support.

# CONCLUSIONS

## A Challenge for Action

In creating the preceding recommendations, the Commission members focused on the strengths of Colorado's adult basic education and workforce development systems. They considered the potential cost and the available resources in both the private and public sectors. They consulted experts in the field and based their recommendations on realistic goals. They attempted to maintain a healthy balance between the needs of the present and the needs of the future. The challenges contained within this report will require significant shifts in legislative, policy and business priorities. While these challenges may seem intimidating, the Commission is confident that they will be achieved.

The Commission's ultimate hope is that Colorado will become a state where it is never too late for an individual to begin or finish her/his basic education. Commission members envision our state as a true learning community -- a place where adults and children are encouraged to continually bolster their knowledge.

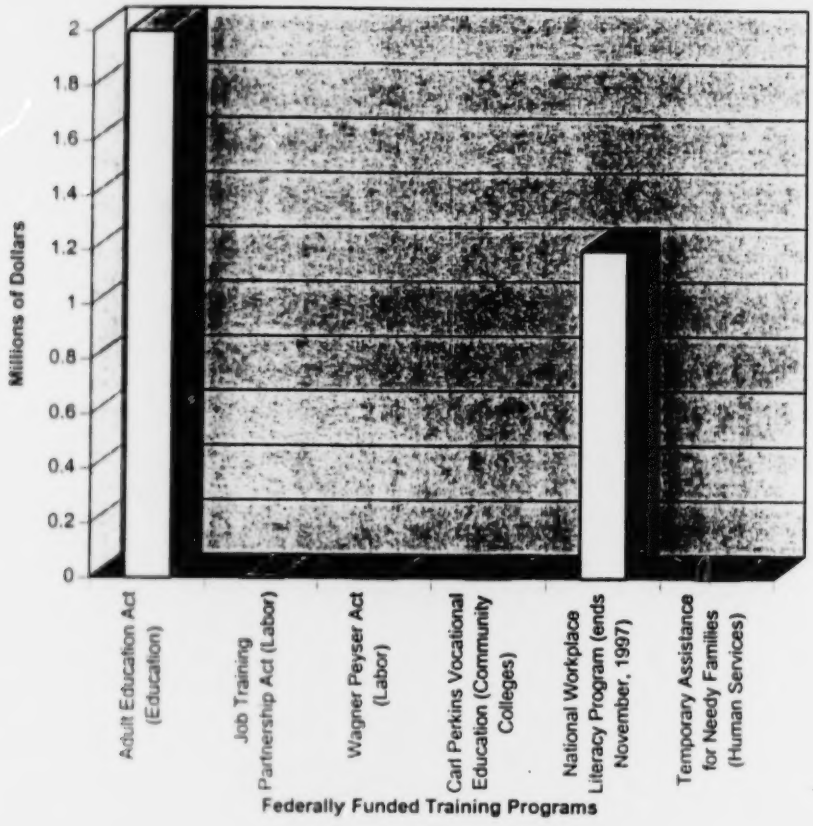
***"Every Coloradan has the right to a free basic education regardless of their age or position in life."***
*~ Pat Wiesner*
*Wiesner Publishing*

Colorado's learning community must include partnerships from both the private and the public sectors. State government has an obvious role in fostering these partnerships so that our diverse economy is preserved and a cohesive, quality system of adult basic education maintained.

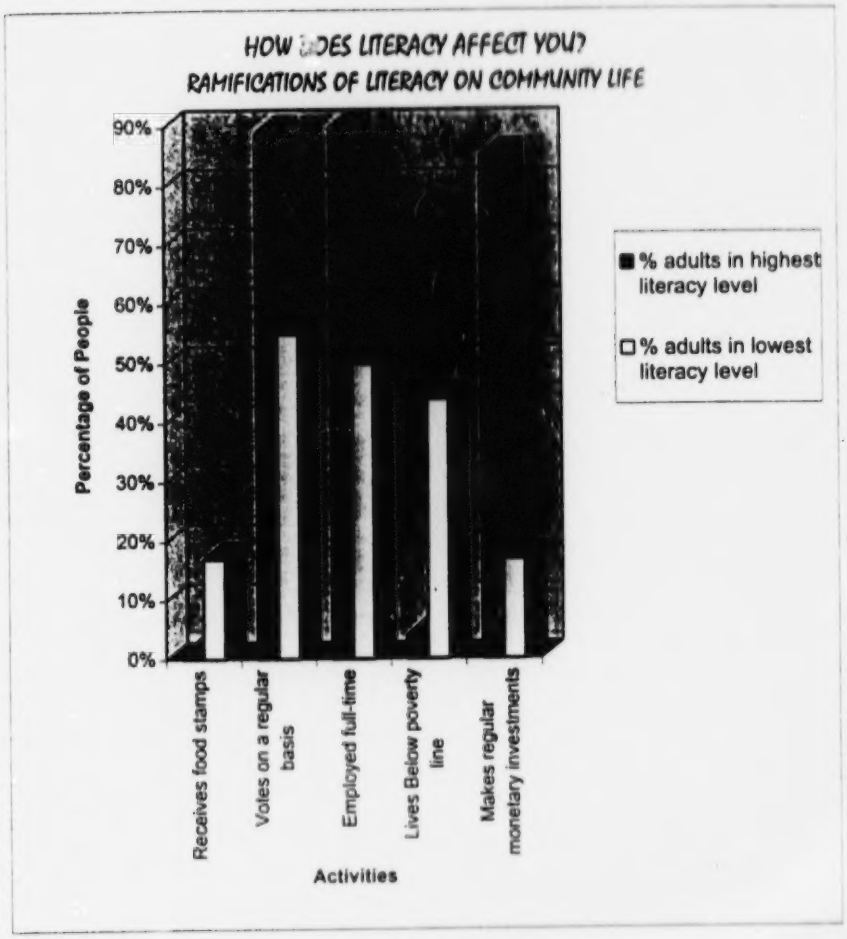
Business, too, has a vital role. There are some outstanding business and adult basic education partnerships in Colorado, yet there is a lack of systemic attention to the natural fit of these partners in building programs that can have far-reaching effects on our industries, communities, families and individuals. Commission members challenge their fellow Coloradans to begin a sincere effort to build the state into a model learning community that promotes the full cycle of learning. By working together, we can ensure that every Coloradan has access to quality basic education training regardless of their personal situation. The Commission members are confident that with resource reallocation and increased commitments by stakeholders, the opportunities to secure quality employment and high quality of life will be enhanced for every Coloradan.

## WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

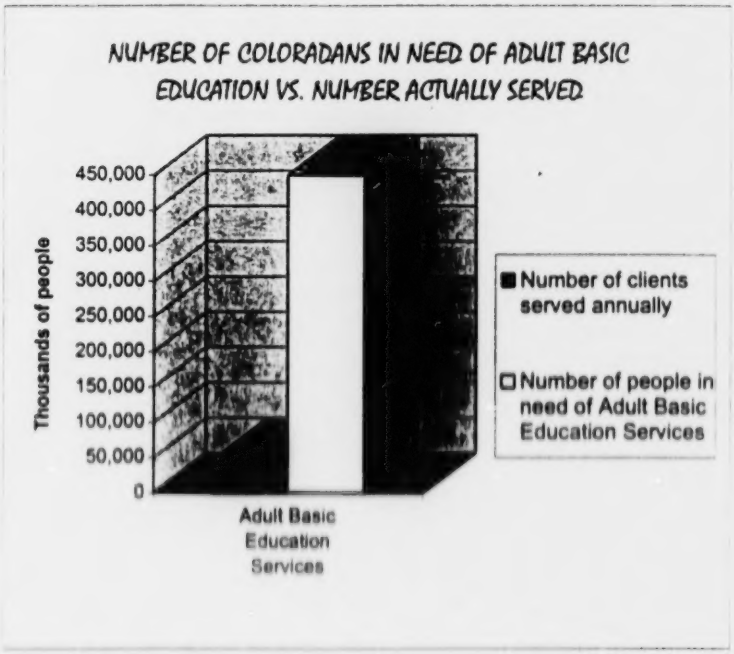
### ANNUALIZED FEDERAL FUNDING (AND THE STATE ENTITY THAT SERVES AS FISCAL AGENT) SPECIFICALLY ALLOTTED FOR ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION



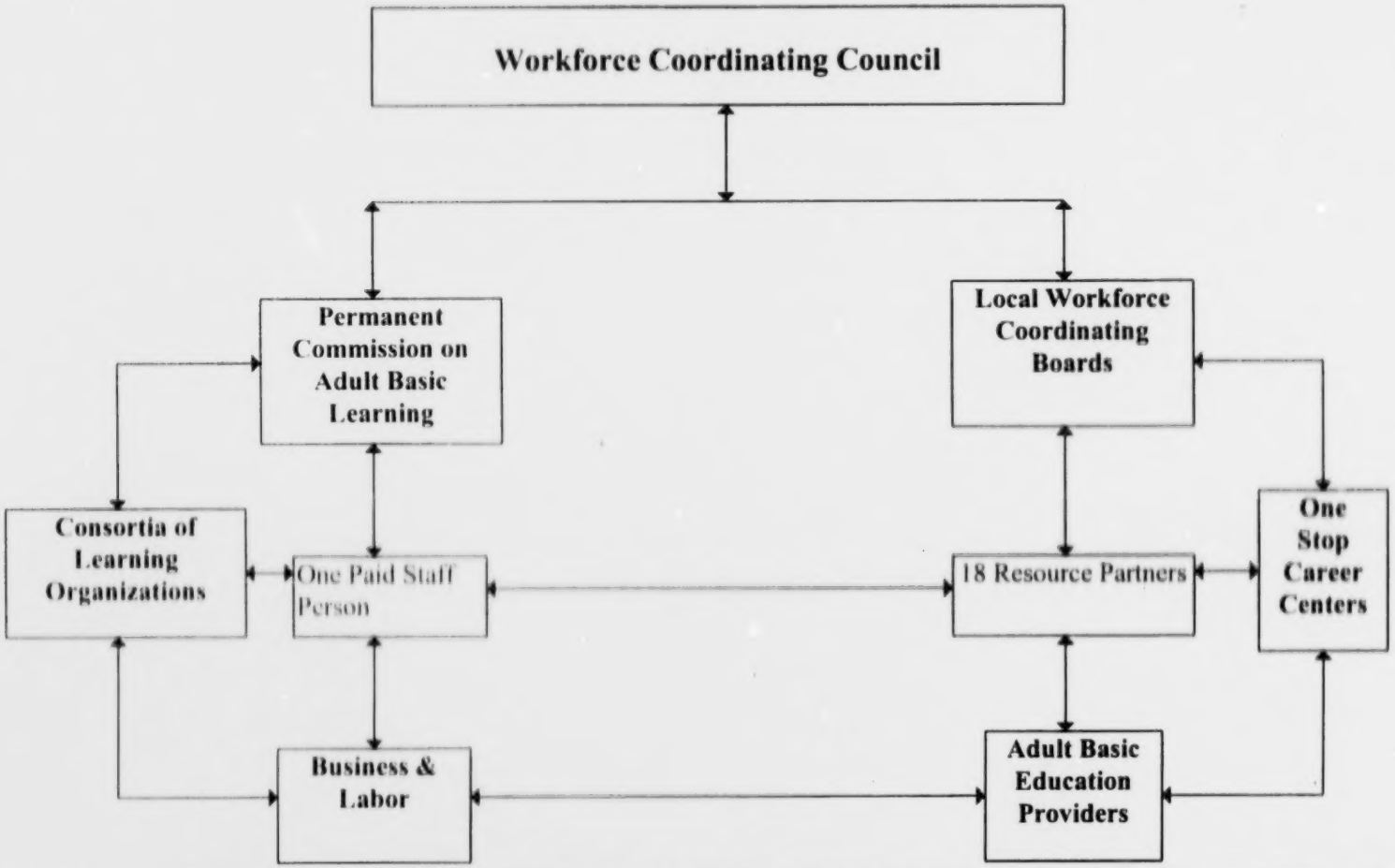

Sources: Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System and the Colorado Departments of Education, Human Services and Labor and Employment.




Source: National Adult Literacy Survey




Source: 1990 Colorado Census Data on Educational Attainment, the Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System and the Colorado Department of Education




**Communication Model for the Colorado Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning**

**The above diagram seeks to visually articulate the vision of the Commission. Adult basic education options and partnerships must be marketed to businesses and facilitated in local regions. To accomplish this goal, the Commission proposes that a permanent Commission on Adult Basic Learning be funded to operate as an arm of the Workforce Coordinating Council. This Commission would merge with the existing Adult Literacy Commission and provide a central body for voicing the opportunities that adult basic education has to offer for Colorado's Workforce Development system. The new Commission would work directly with the 18 Regional Resource Partners who would then serve as liaisons between businesses, the One-Stop Career Center initiative and adult basic education providers.**

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# EXECUTIVE ORDER

## CREATING THE BUSINESS COMMISSION ON ADULT BASIC LEARNING

WHEREAS, the demand for adult basic education, family literacy, workplace learning, and workforce development programs continues to increase; and

WHEREAS, over 450,000 adults in Colorado's workforce have not completed high school, 200,000 Colorado adults have only an eighth grade education and 100,000 have less than an eighth grade education; and

WHEREAS, for every family that moves off AFDC through family literacy, the state saves $5,328 per year; and

WHEREAS, 6,649 school dropouts successfully completed their GED in 1990 and, because of increased earning, contributed a minimum of $678,198 in additional state tax revenue annually; and

WHEREAS, 50% of adults receiving welfare do not have a high school diploma or a GED certificate and lack the basic skills to fill out an application or find an intersection on a map; and

WHEREAS, between 1992 and the year 2000 89% of the new jobs will require adults to have post secondary literacy and mathematical skills; and

WHEREAS, welfare reform legislation has passed and will require many unskilled adults to secure gainful employment within a short period of time; and

WHEREAS, those adults who are currently dependent on welfare will need basic skills training and general education to improve their economic situation; and

WHEREAS, under the new legislation, states have the power to structure much of their own welfare requirements; and

WHEREAS, it is known that adult education efforts aid in the struggle against the intergenerational cycles of poverty, violence and crime; and

WHEREAS, it is known that a child's educational level is contingent on her/his parent's educational level and that participation in family literacy programs greatly enhances a parent's ability to influence the future success of the child; and

WHEREAS, basic education skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, communication, technological knowledge and problem solving are vital to an adult's ability to function in the workplace, family and her/his community; and

WHEREAS, it is known that there is a fundamental link between basic skills and increased economic opportunity for individual Coloradans; and

WHEREAS, the literacy levels of their employees has been identified by employers as vital to overall productivity and efficiency within the workplace; and

WHEREAS, employers report increased productivity when they provide workplace training and adult basic education services; and

WHEREAS, 70% of the workforce that will be working in the year 2000 is already on the job today, and therefore the current restructuring of the pre K-12 and the higher education systems will not immediately close the skills gap that Colorado companies are currently facing; and

WHEREAS, the three most critical challenges facing the American economy are: the impending labor shortage; the shift to an information-based economy; and the demand for a more educated work force; and

WHEREAS, corporate and government leaders throughout the state have begun to explore ways to expand and improve the service delivery of literacy programs to improve the quality of life in their communities, to strengthen families, to improve their bottom line and to serve the needs of their employees.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Roy Romer, Governor of the State of Colorado, by virtue of the authority vested in me under the constitution and laws of the State of Colorado, DO HEREBY ORDER THAT:

1. The Business Commission on Adult Basic Learning is hereby created. It shall consist of no more than 25 members representing business and financial leaders. All members shall be appointed by the Governor to serve at his pleasure.

Members shall serve without compensation. The Governor shall appoint the chair of the Commission.

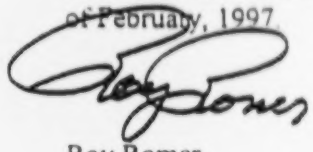
2. The Commission shall have the following duties:

    a. Develop a long-term plan to finance literacy programs and identify possible funding streams that could be used to finance a seamless system of adult basic skills education.
    b. Review literacy service delivery and recommend strategies both financial and policy oriented to create a collaborative, seamless system of delivery.
    c. Identify possible ways for businesses to contribute to and have an impact upon policy and legislative initiatives that effect the literacy skill levels of adults.
    d. Recommend strategies for adult basic education's coordination with the new statewide workforce development system and other welfare reform efforts.
    e. By September 6, 1997, submit recommendations for determining how the General Assembly can implement changes in the current policy which will ensure that adults have quality literacy services and choices.
    f. Develop and maintain policy procedures for the Commission's operation.

3. The Commission shall meet at times and in places designated by the chair.

4. The Commission shall be reviewed no later than September 6, 1997 to determine appropriate action for its continuance, modification, collaborative possibilities, or termination.

GIVEN under my hand and the
Executive Seal of the State of
Colorado, this tenth day
of February, 1997.



Roy Romer
Governor

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